

# ***Beyond the Tidal Basin: Introducing Other Great Flowering Cherry Trees***

A Self-Guided Tour of the Flowering Cherries on the grounds  
of the U.S. National Arboretum

March 26 – April 10, 2005

For centuries, the Japanese have valued the ornamental qualities of flowering cherries. Planting them on hillsides where cultivated land meets the forest, the Japanese equate the transient beauty of the cherry blossom with the brevity of human life. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, Americans, too, were captivated by the delicate beauty of the cherry. Since that time, United States Department of Agriculture scientists have played a role in bringing flowering cherries to the North American landscape through plant collecting in Japan and through a variety of breeding projects. National Arboretum scientists continue this tradition today. Take this self-guided tour of the Arboretum grounds to learn how and to see how varied flowering cherries can be.

## **Some basics:**

*Prunus* is the Latin name for flowering cherries and their relatives (edible cherries, plums, peaches, apricots, almonds).

Because flowering cherries have been popular as landscape plants for centuries, and have crossed international borders, it is often difficult to sort out correct botanical names. So many crosses have been done, selections made, and different names applied to the same type, that it can take a taxonomist, or a scientist specializing in sorting, to accurately identify a specific tree.

Plant names enclosed in single quotes (e.g., 'Dream Catcher') mean that the plant is a cultivar, or cultivated variety. A properly named cultivar will have features (e.g., flower color and form) identical to all others with the same name. To guarantee that you get the type of cherry you want, be sure you ask for it by name.

Flowering time of cherries, like most spring-flowering plants, is dependent on a combination of day length and temperature. Different types also have different blooming seasons—some even flower in the fall. For this reason, during this tour, you will discover the cherries in different stages of bloom and leaf.

Note: You may visit all stops by walking, but remember that the Arboretum is 446 acres. If driving, please park only in designated areas, or if you will not be blocking the road, park along the road with all tires on the pavement. **The stops are marked with numbers on stakes and are also identified on the attached map.**

## **1. *Prunus* 'Dream Catcher' (U.S. National Arboretum Introduction)**

This cultivar resulted from a selection made in 1984 from the research breeding program (see stop #17) and is the first flowering cherry to be released by the National Arboretum. 'Dream Catcher' grows to 25' tall with a vase-shaped crown spread of 15'. Large, clear medium pink single flowers cover the tree in late March to early April. To view a fact sheet, see

<http://www.usna.usda.gov/Newintro/awards.html>.

## **2. *Prunus* × *subhirtella* 'Shidare Higan'**

A weeping cultivar of the Higan Cherry (*Higan* is the Japanese word for spring equinox; *Shidare* means weeping). This one has double pink flowers. Note that the mature tree needs room to spread.

## **3 - 4. *Prunus* × *yedoensis***

Called the Yoshino cherry, this is the tree made famous by the gift of trees from Japan to the United States for the Capital's Tidal Basin. It is because of its popularity in Japan that Yoshino was chosen as one of the types to send to the United States in 1912. As trees from this original shipment age and die, replacing the trees with authentic plants can be challenging. National Arboretum horticulturists assisted with this endeavor by taking cuttings from the original trees and growing them to a size suitable for transplanting.

## **5. *Prunus serrulata* 'Tai Haku'**

The cherries commonly known as "Garden Cherries" are grouped into this *Prunus* species. The grouping assumes a common parent whose varied offspring resulted from centuries of hybridizing and selection in Japan. The Japanese name *Tai Haku* means "big white," a reference to the flowers.

## **6. *Prunus leveilleana* 'Fudanzakura'**

You are unlikely to see this group of trees in full bloom. The Japanese word *Fudanzakura* means "cherry without interruption" and refers to this cultivar's tendency to flower sporadically throughout the winter and early spring months. Unfortunately, frost often turns the opening buds and flowers brown. You would choose this cherry for the joy of finding flowers fully open at surprising times of the year.

## **7. *Prunus* × *yedoensis* 'Akebono'**

This group of cherries are all 'Akebono', a popular American cultivar of the Yoshino cherry (see stop #3) that has soft pink semi-double flowers.

## **8. *Prunus serrulata* 'Shirotae'**

The clothlike, thin white petals of this cultivar inspired the Japanese to name it after a white cloth, made from the paper mulberry tree, called *Shirotae* in Japanese. It has been grown in Japanese gardens since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, remaining a favorite for its large, fragrant blossoms. A large, spreading tree, it needs plenty of room to grow.

## **9. *Prunus × yedoensis* 'Shidare Yoshino'**

This is the same cultivar as stop #14, but has been grafted on a shorter rootstock, which brings the "weeping" habit closer to the ground. Nurseries usually propagate flowering cherries by taking a cutting from the parent tree and grafting it onto the roots and sometimes trunk of another cherry, called the rootstock. In order to obtain a straight trunk, propagators will graft weeping varieties onto longer trunks, while standard varieties (or non-weeping types) are often grafted near the ground.

## **10. *Prunus* 'First Lady' (U.S. National Arboretum Introduction)**

The second release from the Arboretum's field trials (see stop #17), this cultivar was selected for its strongly upright growth habit and dark pink semi-pendulous single flowers. Even though this specimen is small, in 20 years it will grow to 25' tall and 14' wide. Its glossy dark green leaves have shown good disease tolerance. To view a fact sheet, see <http://www.usna.usda.gov/Newintro/awards.html>.

## **11. *Prunus* 'Snofozam'**

View three 20-year-old specimens of this lovely small weeping cherry called Snow Fountains®. Stand at the "X" on the map to look down the valley. The trees are on the left side of the stream bed.

## **12. *Prunus × incam* 'Okame'**

One of the earliest cherries to flower, an 'Okame' in full deep pink flower heralds the beginning of spring.

## **13. *Prunus serrulata* var. *lannesiana***

The large trees growing along the forest edge started as cuttings collected by an Arboretum botanist in Japan in 1983. He visited several sites in Japan where named cultivars of this "garden form" of the flowering cherry grew and took cuttings of the best ones. Collecting germplasm—a reference to the unique genetic makeup of specific plants—is part of the Arboretum's mission. Our scientists study and share this germplasm.

## **14. *Prunus × yedoensis* 'Shidare Yoshino'**

A weeping form of the popular Yoshino cherry (see stop #3). Note how much larger this tree seems than the 'Shidare Yoshino' at stop #9, due to the placement of the grafted cultivar on top of a taller trunk.

### **15. *Prunus serrulata* 'Shirofugen'**

A classic form of the "Garden Cherry," this cultivar dates back to at least the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Historical references show Saint Fugen riding on a white elephant in Buddhist paintings (*Shiro* means white). For this and other stories about flowering cherries, see *Japanese Flowering Cherries* by Wybe Kuitert (Timber Press, 1999).

### **16. *Prunus sargentii* 'Rancho'**

The Sargent cherry, named for Charles Sprague Sargent, an American who collected in Japan in 1892 and discovered the species in the high mountains of northern Japan, has deep pink flowers. 'Rancho' was selected for its more compact shape, making it a more predictable street tree.

### **17. *Prunus* Research Field (see also stop #18)**

While most people are familiar with the more common flowering cherries like Yoshino, few realize the diversity present in the flowering cherry group. This research field illustrates some of that diversity. Note the variation in bloom date—some trees are in full bloom, while others are still in bud; the variation in bloom color, from white to dark pink; the variation in form, from tall upright to short rounded; and the variation in bark characteristics—from smooth and shiny to rough and peeling. Scientists at the National Arboretum select from this diversity by combining traits from these species through a breeding program that aims to create new varieties of flowering cherries that will fit into different landscape settings.

### **18. *Prunus* Research Field (see also stop #17)**

Why are these trees planted in rows? Because they are part of the Arboretum's cherry research collection and are being evaluated for traits such as disease and pest resistance, tolerance to environmental stresses, plant habit, bloom time and duration, bark characteristics, and flower traits. The fields contain a mix of trees: some are used for breeding, others are hybrids that are in various stages of selection for eventual cultivar release. Since the fields serve as working research plots, they are not set up like the garden or display areas visitors experience in other parts of the Arboretum.

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